# THE NIGERIAN DECLARATION OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES

## BEING TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO ON THE OCCASION OF THE FORMAL LAUNCHING OF THE CAMPAIGN ON NATIONAL REBIRTH, EAGLE SQUARE, ABUJA 10TH SEPTEMBER, 1999

Your Excellency, Vice-President Atiku Abubakar,

The President of the Senate,

The Speaker of the House of Representatives,

Chief Justice of the Federation,

Honourable Ministers,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Senators and Honourable Members of the House of Representatives,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a little over one hundred days today since we all gathered at this venue, the Eagle Square, to herald the advent of what a vast majority of our people believed was the Dawn of a New Era for our nation. There is no doubt that in the period between my election in February and the inauguration in May there was a revolution of rising expectations among our people. Our people saw in the return of democracy the hope for solutions to the numerous ills afflicting our society : from general insecurity of life and property to poor infrastructure ; from mass unemployment and mass poverty to disrespect of the fundamental rights of citizens and from the perception of Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations of the world to its status as a pariah state among the comity of nations. I must add with a sense of modesty and humility that many also saw in me a likely miracle worker, the leader they had been yearning for.

These expectations and my own firm belief in the great potentials of our nation, given the right leadership, and my conviction that leadership is a trust from God and that every leader shall one day be called upon to account for his or her actions in the hereafter, propelled me to accept the challenge and to resolve not to fail the people. On my release from prison, a little under fifteen months ago, I went into a pact with my Lord to do His bidding at all times. I saw my survival and freedom as a message from God to do what needs to be done in Nigeria. I could not disregard the call of God to duty.

As I indicated in my address on May 29, the event of that day should be seen by all Nigerians as the beginning of a genuine renaissance for our nation on the eve of the 21st century and third millennium. That process of National Rebirth, I noted, will involve

a series of fundamental, structural, attitudinal and behavioural changes in our style of governance and in ways of doing business. It will also involve deep changes in our individual and collective orientations and expectations of government and its various agencies and institutions.

In that address and in my addresses during the campaign and after, I identified a number of priority areas for our government. I pledged to run an inclusive, open, transparent and accountable government. I pledged to fight corruption. I pledged to improve on the security situation in the country, I pledged food security for the nation, I pledged to revitalise education, I pledged to attend to the root causes of the Niger-Delta crisis and to find solution, I pledged to resuscitate our decaying infrastructure and I promised to win back for the government the trust of the people among other promises. Even more significantly, I swore on that day before God Almighty and before man to uphold the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I swore to serve Nigeria with all my strength, to defend her unity, uphold her honour and glory and conduct the affairs of state without fear or favour.

Since May 29, we have worked assiduously to fulfil most of those promises. Our cabinet is the most inclusive cabinet in the political history of this country. For the first time, all political parties are represented in the cabinet. It is no more a zero-sum-game where the winner takes all and the loser is left to be plotting the fall of the government. We hold weekly cabinet meetings where matters are discussed openly and frankly for decisions to be reached. Furthermore, we have not hesitated to clarify issues as they arise. Indeed, very soon, the office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on National Orientation and Public Affairs will open channels of communication with me. You can write to me, fax to me or e-mail to me and you can be sure that your mails will be answered.

On transparency and accountability, we re-introduced the Civil Service Rules (the old General Orders) as well as Financial Regulations. We have also submitted a draft bill to the National Assembly on corruption. We have introduced a code of conduct for all members of our government just as we re-introduced subsidy on fertilizer to ensure greater harvest. In fulfillment of my pledge, I was at the Niger-Delta a couple of weeks into my tenure, and we have already prepared and submitted a draft bill on the Niger-Delta Development to the National Assembly. That bill brings three major actors together to solve the problem of the Niger-Delta—the Oil Companies, the States and the Federal Government. At the same time and in fulfilment of my pledge to resuscitate our decaying infrastructure, our government has made a substantial grant to the National Electric Power Authority, NEPA, to rehabilitate its facilities.

Primary school teachers who were on strike on our assumption of office have returned to the classroom after we had paid the salary arrears. Only a couple of weeks

ago, while on a visit to Gombe we were told of how the incidence of armed banditry has subsided dramatically since we assumed office and we set up a special joint police-military operations in the North-East and North-West.

Ladies and gentlemen, what we have tried to do in the last 100 days is to work hard to fulfil some of our promises to the people so that the Nigerian people will once again begin to trust their leaders. We ran our campaign on the platform of trust. We will do everything to keep that trust. I believe that it is a pre-condition for any progress to be made. It has not been easy. But we never had any illusions about the tough job and tough choices ahead. We have registered some significant successes. I believe that we will register even greater success if the people come out and play positive roles in the development process.

It is understandable to note that at the moment, the general orientation of our citizens towards the government is one of demanding our rights—those rights enshrined in the Constitution. But with rights go duties and civic obligations and responsibilities.

In our various traditional societies, the people did not ask for their rights from community without at the same time ensuring that they have met their responsibilities. What has happened to that lofty tradition ? As we dedicate ourselves to the Rebirth of our Nation, I would like to appeal to every Nigerian to seriously consider whether he or she performs his or her duties and responsibilities to his or her fellow citizen and to the state.

While I will continue to abide by my oath of office, to work tirelessly to improve the life of our people, I shall expect every citizen to also live up to his or her responsibilities. For too long, our people have demanded their rights from the state without at the same time performing their responsibilities. Many ardent critics of NEPA, for example, do not pay their NEPA bills as and when due. Nor the critics of poor welfare services pay their taxes as and when due. Many people who complain about accidents on our roads drive recklessly and become a source of danger on our roads, constituting a threat to other road users. Many people see crime being committed and turn away. Invariably, they blame the police. I can assure you the police is on the way to improving.

It will not help our nation if people just sit and demand for their rights or privileges without thinking of their own responsibilities to others, their communities, their State, their neighbours, and even their families. If every parent would conscientiously shoulder his or her responsibility towards his or her children ; if every teacher will conscientiously teach his or her wards ; if every citizen will treat his neighbour as he would like his neighbour to treat him ; if every person will make deliberate efforts towards upliftment of his community, Nigeria will certainly be a much happier place for us all.

Fellow countrymen, much of the success we have recorded in our first 100 days was mainly attributable to the government's determination to succeed. I believe that we have earned a bit of your trust in the last 100 days. We shall now want to move in full swing to introduce programmes aimed at National Re-Orientation of the psyche of our people in both public and private sectors of life. The aim is two-fold : first, it is to educate both the public official and the ordinary citizen about the limits of the power of the former as well as the limits of the legitimate demands of the latter. Secondly, it aims to educate particularly the ordinary citizens about their duties and responsibilities to the state, their communities, their families and even to themselves.

I believe that our people are naturally helpful and considerate. Traditionally, we have a communal and caring society. If our people have not exhibited those traits in their relationship with their neighbours and the state in recent times, it is perhaps because of some creeping alien influences or breaking up of communal ties which must be checked. It is worthwhile to note that the nation's Constitution is explicit on the rights of the people without giving equal attention to the responsibilities of the people. Both are crucial to national development. It is in recognition of this fact that we are today launching the Nigerian Declaration of Human Responsibilities. The Declaration is the first of its kind by any government of this country. It is conceived as a handy reference material that highlights the duties and responsibilities of the citizen in a simplified, non-technical language. It aims at taking the discourse on civics and human rights to the grassroots. That declaration which I will formally present to the public during this ceremony contains those dos of the citizen that will assist us in our struggle to make Nigeria great for us all. Indeed, it is what can be called our Pact with the People. In the Declaration, the rights of the citizen are enumerated, so are his privileges. Next are enumerated the duties of the state towards the citizen. It does not stop at that but goes on to state the responsibilities that go with the enjoyment of the rights identified for the citizen. In other words, if you expect me to improve your living conditions, I am also going to request that you perform your socially expected roles.

We adapt this Declaration from the work of an international group of eminent persons, which I had been part of and supported.

Our administration proclaims and upholds the Declarations contained in the Charter, as a binding ground norm in our governance of the Nigerian state. Fellow Nigerians, beginning today, we have flagged off our Campaign for National Rebirth. I expect Nigerians from all social strata to make resolutions from today, if they had not done so already, to change for the better. We have to resolve to think positively, talk positively and act positively so that Nigeria can be great again.

The Declaration enjoins us to expect from others and from the State while it also enjoins others and the State to expect from us. It complements Human Rights with Human Responsibilities. And both are two sides of the same coin. A coin with only one side may be regarded as counterfeit or unspendable. Human Rights without Human Responsibilities will be incomplete and so will Human Responsibilities without Human Rights. Let us resolve to demand the Rights due to us and to offer the Responsibilities that are demanded of us.

Let us march forth for the Rebirth of Nigeria as I present to you the Declaration of Human Responsibilities.

Long live Nigeria !